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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, Sept. 17, 1931.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Planting Bulbs for Spring." Information from W.R. Beattie,
Bureau of Plant Industry, U.S.D.A.

Bulletins available: "Boning Lamb Cuts," (Leaflet No. 74) and "Daffodils",
(Circular 122).

---ooOoo---

Yesterday I had a lapse of memory. Something I wanted to tell you I forgot all about until our chat was over. So, please, may I make up for it today by telling it first thing before we get on the subject of planting bulbs for springtime. You remember that yesterday we discussed lamb roast-boned stuffed lamb roast. I meant at that time to announce the new leaflet on boning lamb cuts--that's the name of it "Boning Lamb Cuts"--which tells in words and pictures just how the bones should be removed to make roasts convenient to carve. This new leaflet will make a nice companion to the leaflet on cooking lamb--the one I mention so frequently.

That's all about lamb. Now let's talk about spring flowers. I know this is September, but, according to our friend W.R.B. who is a most learned man in garden lore, September is the time to prepare for such spring blooms as tulips, daffodils, narcissus and crocuses. Dear me I'm always confused about that last word. Didn't a very proper person once tell me that two or more of those flowers were correctly spoken of as croci and not crocuses. But, as you know what I mean anyway.

Did you ever hear that the way you treat bulbs in the fall has a lot to do with the flowers that bloom in the spring? That's what W.R.B. maintains. First the soil must be prepared for the bulbs. Clean off all the left-overs from former crops. Then, if the soil is too dry to work, water it, and wait a day or so, till the water has penetrated. Then spread one pound of finely ground bone meal over each three square yards of surface, and spade the soil to a depth eight or nine inches. Next, put on a second application of bone meal--one pound of bone meal to each five square yards of surface. Rake the soil until the lumps are broken, and the bed is nice and smooth."

I asked W.R.B. how far apart and how deep to plant the tulip bulbs.

Here's what he replied. "Before you begin planting, place the bulbs on top of the ground, seven or eight inches apart. First, place a row of bulbs entirely around the bed, about six inches from the edge. Then arrange the bulbs more or less in rows or squares throughout the interior of the bed. After the bulbs are all placed, make holes for them with a long narrow trowel.

Plant them root end downward-, of course, and four or five inches deep. On heavy soils three inches may be deep enough, while on light sandy soils five inches is not too deep. If the soil is dry at planting time, give the bed a light watering and cover it with an inch or so of well-rotted manure. That's about all there is to do except keep the beds free from weeds, until the bulbs begin to peep through next spring. Oh, yes. And possibly you may need to watch that moles don't burrow in the beds and disturb the bulbs. There is also a possibility that mice may follow the runs made by moles and eat the bulbs. Moles can be controlled by traps and poison".

Next we talked about putting crocus bulbs in the lawn.

W.R.B. suggested using a narrow trowel or a sharp, round stick to make the holes. "All you have to do," he said is to make a hole about two or three inches deep, drop the bulb in and cover it. Crocus bulbs remain from year to year, and give lovely blossoms in the spring before it's time to mow the lawn. A little fertilizer scattered over the lawn each year early in the spring, especially where the crocus bulbs are located, will help in their growth and give you better flowers." Also a better lawn.

"And Narcissus?" I said. I should love to have some white narcissus in my spring flower garden, if I only knew how to plant them."

"Of course, Aunt Sammy, Put narcissus in the ground just as you do tulips, only a bit deeper. When narcissus bulbs are once started you can leave the bulbs in the same place for three or four years without disturbing them. It isn't necessary to move these bulbs until they become so thick they need separating. When it comes time to separate the bulbs, wait until the leaves die in the summer. Then dig the bulbs, dry them on screens, and store them for a time in a cool, dry place where they can get plenty of air. When late August or early September again rolls around, go over the bulbs, separate them and use the larger ones for resetting your beds. The smaller ones may be planted in a special bed, or rather thickly in a row to increase the number of flowering bulbs. Are there any other flowers you are considering for your spring bed, Aunt Sammy?"

"Hyacinths. I would like to have at least a few of those sweet-smelling flowers next year."

"You can plant them in much the same way as tulips, only don't put them quite so deep in the ground. They want a rich soil, too, and they don't need to be planted as early in the fall as tulips. I like hyacinths but tulips and narcissus are really my favorites. And I like to plant them in little clumps or groups for bright color. Sometimes I use them for borders and sometimes I plant groups of them in the open spaces of the shrubbery. Now and then I have a single tulip growing in a bed of iris or some other plant. I always admire those individual flowers at blooming time-- they seem to stand out so independently. But the mass effect of a single variety of tulips or narcissus in a border makes the most gorgeous display. In some of my borders I have tulip and narcissus bulbs that have not been disturbed for five or six years. Still they go on blooming, year after year."

W.R.B., who is a very busy man, began reaching for his hat.

"Wait just one minute please?" I said. "I have just one question that I'd like to have answered. I've heard that the petals of tulips should always

be gathered before they fall. Is there any reason for this?"

W.R.B. nodded. "The petals of the tulips frequently have a disease which, when the petals are allowed to remain, will get on the leaves and injure the growth of the plants. By picking off and destroying the petals, you will avoid spreading the disease. It is a big job to gather all the petals, but it will pay especially where only a limited number of bulbs are grown.

"Are there any more garden jobs due at this month?"

"Oh, dear me, yes", said W.R.B. "Peonies should be planted in September And Japanese iris may be lifted and divided at this season. September is an excellent time also to transplant delphiniums, so that they can become well established before cold weather. This is a good season to sow grass seed or move sod. If possible do these two jobs just before a rain. As for weeds, you have to keep an eye on them even at this late date. Don't let them go to seed in or near your garden or you'll be in for extra work next year. Yes, and even on a warm sunny day like this it's wise to think of frosts. Provide some coverings to protect your garden favorites from the early biting frost. It is well worth while because after the first frost we often have several weeks of delightful weather when we can get special enjoyment out of the garden."

Nex week I'll tell you what W.R.B. has to say about potting plants for the house--another job for this month.

And tomorrow we'll answer some questions about canning and plan our dinner for Sunday.

